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MotoGP

The repost...

Marquez still in 'crisis'? It didn't look that way at Sachsenring where the Catalan took a third successive MotoGP victory around the twisty Germany curves. Honda fired back with a 1-2 as Pedrosa took the second step and MotoGP is set to get tasty with trips to Indianapolis and Brno coming up. Marquez still has to find 65 points over Valentino Rossi however to regain that top spot

Photo by Repsol Honda







First double-first for RD...

A 6th and a 12th: aside from these two blips Red Bull KTM's Ryan Dungey has finished in the top two of all sixteen of the 450MX motos run this season in the Lucas Oil AMA Pro National Motocross series. At Spring Creek the Supercross Champ went 1-1 for the first time in 2015 and now holds a 56 point lead over a subdued Ken Roczen with four rounds and eight races to go

Photo by Simon Cudby



AMA-MX



**MX**

Time to get rough...?

MXGP World Champion Tony Cairoli thankfully didn't injure his fractured left arm further in this spill in Qualification for the Latvian Grand Prix. The series enters an interesting phase with round thirteen of eighteen this weekend in the Czech Republic and the last hard-pack race in Europe before three meetings in sand during August. The break has been invaluable for riders like Cairoli, Clement Desalle and Max Nagl to recover fitness and look to make a challenge to Romain Febvre

Photo by Ray Archer







MARVIN MUSQUIN



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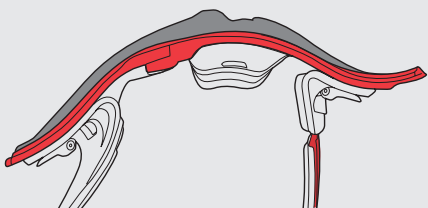


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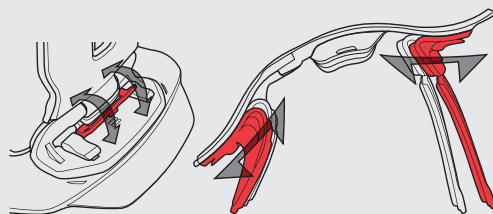
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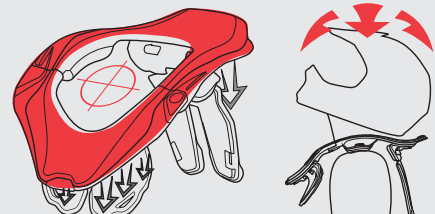
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SBK

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MAZDA RACEWAY LAGUNA SECA • JULY 19th •

Race one winner: Chaz Davies, Ducati

Race two winner: Chaz Davies, Ducati

Blogs by Graeme Brown & Matthew Roberts
Photos by Kawasaki/GeeBee/Ducati Corse Press/Milagro

CHAZ DAVIES CAUGHT THE EYE AND BLITZED THE SPEED CAMERAS AROUND ONE OF THE TIGHTEST AND COOLEST CIRCUITS ON ANY FIM ROAD RACING WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP CALENDAR. LAGUNA SECA WAS A FORMER HUNTING GROUND FOR THE WELSHMAN AND HE RETURNED IN GLORY AS SBK HIT ROUND 9 OF 13

DAVIES DEVOURS LAGUNA SECA







SBK USA

CALIFORNIAN DREAMING...

By Graeme Brown

It is a long way from Europe to California but a trip to Laguna Seca is always worth it. If only for the new kicks and cheap Levis!

Laguna is one of those iconic tracks that everyone knows, and immediately thinks about the Corkscrew and the many racing incidents that have written its name in legend. My first memory was 1998, watching on TV, when Akira Yanagawa and Doug Chandler crashed on the entry to the corner. Of course people now remember it for the battles between Valentino Rossi and Casey Stoner and more recently with Rossi and Marquez.

This weekend didn't see so much drama but in the second WSBK race spots of rain began to fall as the lights went out on the start gantry. Chaz Davies admitted afterwards he had wondered what to do but then thought 'just go for it'. And go for it he did. Tom Sykes joked in the post race press conference that he knew you needed big balls to race at Laguna but when he saw Davies fire down the Corkscrew with the rain falling he knew the Welshman had the biggest pair on the day.

There was a suggestion, however, that we may not be back here in the future. The Laguna Seca track is unique in so far as the land is formally designated a State Park and is owned by Monterey County. The facilities are operated by the Sports Car Racing Association of the Monterey Peninsula (SCRAMP). SCRAMP has been on the go for over 50 years and created what we know as Mazda Raceway when the military handed the land over to Monterey County in 1974.

The County however no longer has the resources or (it seems) the will to invest in the circuit and talk at the weekend was that they were looking to sell up. SCRAMP themselves

are a not for profit organization so couldn't fund the operation themselves.

It would seem that the most likely candidate to take over would be the International Speedway Corporation (ICS) that operates and manages a number of very lucrative NASCAR tracks. That would see Dorna having to negotiate a new deal and most people seemed a bit pessimistic about that.

It would be a shame to see Laguna lose any form of International motorcycle racing so hopefully an agreement can be reached. Otherwise these jeans are going to have to last a long time.

On the racing front the biggest rumour of the weekend was the position of Yamaha's Superbike entry for 2016. Paul Denning's Crescent team have emerged as a front runner to run a factory effort, despite currently being Suzuki's sole entrant and having a long standing history with them. It would appear that Suzuki's involvement in MotoGP, and the inherent spiralling costs, could signal the death knell for the Superbike team. The manufacturer has a new variant of the GSX-R1000 coming next year but a race bike may not be viable until mid season.

So the possibility of another year with an under-developed machine that is currently under performing could be enough to see Crescent jump ship to Yamaha.

Unfortunately I have to end on a sad note. In the last race of the day, the MotoAmerica Superbike/Superstock1000 race, we lost Martinez Bernat and Dani Rivas who were involved in a first lap crash. My thoughts and condolences go to their family and friends.





Aprilia's Jordi Torres runs to a fifth and a fourth to equal his second best weekend of the season so far on the distinctive Italian machinery

What now for Suzuki in SBK? Alex Lowes sixth place in the first race was the best for the official team at Laguna and a lowly return



FINE LINES...

By Matthew Roberts

It has been a sobering couple of weeks in the world of motorsport with the sad death of Jules Bianchi followed too closely by those of Bernat Martínez and Dani Rivas at Laguna Seca. In Spain, Kenny Noyes remains in a coma following a crash during the CEV round at Aragon, whilst in the British Superbike paddock at Brands Hatch news reached us over the weekend that James Puttrel, who was critically injured alongside Jordy de Jong at the same circuit in a prior BSB round back in April, is progressing well but has suffered irreparable damage to his spinal chord and will not walk again. Thankfully De Jong is on the road to a full recovery and he was at Brands to give his thanks to the marshals and medics who helped to save his life following the incident in the Superstock 600 race.

If there was anybody at Brands that did not need reminding of the dangers of racing motorcycles, it was Stuart Easton. Only four years ago the amiable Scotsman was fighting for his life after a crash at the North West 200 road race and it is only in recent months that 'Rat Boy' has really returned to full form. So the sight of him jumping off his PBM Kawasaki Superbike at around 150mph in Sunday's Race 1 could hardly have been starker or more worrying given other recent events.

Easton smashed into the air fence as his bike cleared it, somehow escaping with a suspected fracture to his leg and ligament damage to his knee. The fine line between casualty and catastrophe has rarely been so precariously negotiated, certainly not twice. Whether Stuart has the mental strength to come back from this one, with his wife due to give birth any day, remains to be seen although it would not be

surprising to anybody who knows him if (and when) he does. This is the resolve possessed by those rare few who are born to race and willingly accept the dangers of their job, because for guys like Stuart Easton, racing is far more than that.

For Richard Cooper, it is not even a job. The 32-year-old earns his living as a delivery driver for a motorcycle dealer in the East Midlands but on BSB weekends he rubs shoulders with international household names like Shane Byrne and Josh Brookes. In Race 1, after Byrne crashed out, only Brookes was able to get the better of 'Coops' as he stormed to only his second career podium in BSB, his first in dry conditions. In the process, his third-fastest lap of the race earned him a front row start for Race 2 and the opportunity to take on the brand new 'King of Brands' challenge, with big money at stake.

This latest experiment-slash-publicity-stunt from the refreshingly innovative BSB organisers was offering £5,000 to any front-row qualifier for Race 2 to start from the back of the grid. Should they then come through to take the win their prize would be boosted to £50,000, with £25,000 on offer for second place and £10,000 for third – as well as double championship points. Love or hate the idea, it's an interesting concept and it certainly had the fans and media talking.

I don't know what Richard earns as a delivery driver, but like most of us on an average wage, surely a minimum payday of £5,000 would be tempting? "I don't race for the money, I race for these," he grinned, pointing to his trophy after Race 1.





A couple of hours later he had another to add to his collection after finishing a close third to Brookes and Byrne... from the front row of the grid, of course. To me Cooper's attitude and achievement captures the true essence of racing at a time when the motorsport community needs a morale boost.

In the end, the uncompromising quest for glory of the men and women like him is the ultimate tribute to those who have given their life for the same cause.

*James Puttrell's family have set up a fund to help him adapt to his life-changing injuries. To donate, click here <http://www.gofundme.com/yzdg8gc>

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AMA-MX

SPRING CREEK NATIONAL

MILLVILLE, MN • JULY 18th • Rnd 8 of 12

450 Winner: Ryan Dungey, KTM

250 Winner: Cooper Webb, Yamaha



AMA MX SPRING CREEK

DUNGEY HITS BACK AT BARCIA

By Steve Matthes
Photos by Simon Cudby

YAMAHA KEEP UP THE WIN STREAK AS STAR RACING SETTLE FURTHER INTO THE 'NEW PRO CIRCUIT' MANTLE BUT THE ORANGE ARMY FIRED BACK IN 450MX AS RYAN DUNGEY REDISCOVERED SOME MOJO AT HIS HOME EVENT AND BUMPED BARCIA TO THE SECOND STEP



PLAY

Round eight of the Lucas Oil Pro Motocross Championships went off this past weekend in Millville, Minnesota.

The fans were no doubt looking forward to the hometown boys of Jeremy Martin (250) and Ryan Dungey (450) riding off with the overall wins and that almost happened. The two riders took three out of the four moto wins but Jeremy's third in the first moto (with a clutch lever flopping around) ruined his chance at the overall. Dungey did his part though.

The Spring Creek facility is one of the best tracks on the circuit. It's got a little bit of everything with great elevation, two sets of Lommel-ish sand whoops, a long start where horsepower is king and a scary first turn. You have to be great at all the different elements to do well at Millville and it's long been one of the favorites to many riders over the years. The facility has been hosting nationals since 1983 and it seems that right now, with the addition of Mt Martin (named after the track owner John, father of Jeremy and Alex) a few years ago, it's about perfect.

Let's get into the race and some other news and notes...

-For the first time all year, Red Bull KTM's Ryan Dungey won with 1-1 scores. After watching JGR Yamaha's Justin Barcia take the last two overalls, we can probably surmise that Dungey did not want to let that be three in front of his hometown friends and family. And there was no doubt as Dungey passed Barcia both motos (Barcia with double holeshots) and pulled out nice size leads in both motos. His pass on Barcia in moto two down the hill was a testament to his bravery and there's just no chance Dungey wanted to give the chip-on-the-shoulder Barcia some more confidence.

In talking to the KTM guys, they've been impressed with Ryan's comfort level on the new 450SXF Factory Edition in that he hasn't changed offsets and links at all since the start of the nationals. The bike has gotten a lot better say team guys but it's mostly due to internal suspension adjustments. Dungey's got

a 56-point advantage right now searching for his third 450MX title and we think it's looking good for him to do just that.

-Barcia was again very good as he was far in front of the third place rider in both motos. The long and deep start proved to be very beneficial for #51 as he grabbed the two holeshots and his teammates Weston Peick and Phil Nicoletti were right there as well. Barcia's got a ton of confidence right now and we think will be Dungey's main challenger from here on out.

-Relatively speaking, the defending champion Kenny Roczen of the RCH Suzuki team had a bad weekend. We'll give him a bit of a mulligan due to the ankle injury in supercross and then the back injury at the start of the outdoors but the last few weeks have been rough on Kenny. At Millville Roczen went a distant 3-4 in both motos and appeared to be winded badly late in the races. Yoshimura Suzuki's Blake Baggett put about twenty seconds on Roczen in the second half of the second moto in catching and passing the German to take third overall on the day.

What's going with Roczen exactly is a mystery. You would think that now he's back racing and able to train each week that he would be getting stronger as the series goes on but it's really been the opposite. Barcia has beaten him six straight motos and now Baggett at Millville. Lots of talk around Roczen that he's not getting along with the bike/team and of course he split from trainer Aldon Baker earlier this year so when you see him being visibly tired in the motos, that starts speculation up that it was a bad move. As we stated above, we'll give Roczen a mulligan for this series but the 2016 supercross championship is a huge one for Kenny reestablishing himself as a future champion.

-In the 250's, it was Star Racing Yamaha's Cooper Webb taking his first win of the series (he did miss four races with an ankle injury) with 1-2 moto scores. Webb definitely benefited from points leader and hometown hero Jeremy Martin's clutch bolt coming out in the



Eighteen year old West Coast SX Champ Cooper Webb needed no second invitation to take advantage of his teammate's problem in the first moto. It was his first moto victory of the season

first moto but early on - before the clutch issue with Jeremy - Webb was on the gas and passed the red plate holder. In the second moto he had nothing for Martin but the runner-up spot was good enough to take the win. Webb cannot scoop the title but he certainly can take a lot of wins at the remaining four rounds.

Martin wasn't happy at the end of the day. Still, he had to take some comfort in putting ten points on his main challenger, Red Bull KTM's Marvin Musquin, to make his lead 19 with eight motos to go. Martin, his brother Alex (who went 4-14 with crashes in the second moto) and JGR's Phil Nicoletti all headed up to Millville after the last round at RedBud to practice at Spring Creek and prepare. The state of Minnesota hasn't had many great riders over the years but now with Dungey and the Martin brothers, the late great Donny Schmit must be up there smiling.

-Speaking of Musquin, if he loses this championship he's going to lay awake at night thinking about the first moto at Millville. Marvin took the early lead and was pulling away (setting the fastest lap of the moto) until he tipped over in a turn. He got up in tenth, worked his way back to sixth and then crashed again. Eventually he finished eighth but with Martin unable to use his clutch, the worst Musquin probably would've done if he had stayed upright was second behind Webb. This could have limited the damage to Martin but as it was, Musquin's mistakes were costly. How costly they were remains to be seen...

-Some rumors coming from Europe had Team USA not coming to the annual Motocross of Nations in France at the end of September. I spoke with USA manager Roger Decoster and he's in the process of selecting the team although he did admit that the AMA didn't seem to be as enthusiastic as usual this year. Rumors are that Ryan Dungey is thinking about not going for the seventh year in a row and that's understandable. Dungey will be doing the last American national the second last week of August, then the Glen Helen USGP the

third week of September, the MXoN the next week and then a week off and the Red Bull Straight Rhythm and Monster Cup in Las Vegas. That leaves Ryan with about two months to get ready for Anaheim 1, 2016. So to this media hack, I understand if he chooses to bow out. Besides, he hasn't been able to ride like the 'Ryan Dungey' I see over here week in and week out and perhaps he's tired of getting the flack for USA when they lose.

So who to send? Well, it seems that Justin Barcia and Jeremy Martin are locks for MXGP and MX2 respectively right? Roger mentioned something about maybe putting Cooper Webb on the 450 and of course, Honda's Trey Canard is coming back this weekend. With three years of losses now and looking like no Dungey, Team USA will be the biggest underdogs perhaps since the first time they won it in 1981.

-And finally, some fall-out on Ryan Villopoto hanging up his boots. I've been reading plenty of articles on both sides of the Atlantic about this and I have to say, some people aren't getting it. The Ryan Villopoto that lined up for the GP's this year was not the Ryan Villopoto the American fans saw for years. He was noticeably heavier and lacked his usual aggression. However, he had plenty of time to prepare, mistakes were made on his choice of prep and he got beat. Plain and simple. He also could have been healed up in time to race the last few GP's and chose to retire instead. Looking back, this entire GP experience wasn't handled properly by many people on both sides and obviously shouldn't have been attempted.

There's no other way to look at it other than a complete failure by Ryan, his camp, Monster Energy for pushing for it and his team in Europe for having issues with the bike. This brief attempt won't sully his legacy, we'll all forget about it over time and he's one of the all-time greatest but now we can all see that this was a rare mistake by Ryan and so be it. Too wring our hands and produce excuses for him is futile. It shouldn't have probably ever happened in the first place.



AMA MX takes all types (above right). Blake Baggett fought through to post a third podium finish of 2015 and has been a top five regular









How many races do you want to do Ryan? The 2015 SX Champ could sit out the MX of Nations in France...



Savatgy tackles the downhills and provides some relief for Pro Circuit's Outdoor season with another podium finish



Ken Roczen has taken two moto wins from sixteen; perhaps not as many as he was expecting but injuries have played their part



RYAN ON A ROLL...

By Steve Matthes

Looking unstoppable for another 450MX title, Red Bull KTM's Ryan Dungey put on a riding clinic at Millville to take the win. With a bike that seems to be working for him and himself working with trainer Aldon Baker, Dungey's perhaps never been better. After Millville he sat down to talk about his day.

Congratulations. A fine race day for you, definitely from where we were sitting but how did it translate from your perspective?

I guess just starting the day out right from practice. The first session was a little muddy. But then the second practice the track came around. Going into last night we got woken up at 2:00 am because the storms were just hitting hard and it was raining. I was like, I know it's going to be muddy but if we don't get that afternoon shower, judging from experience here that I've had, the track's going to be awesome by the time we go out there racing. And it was.

We got off to a good start and got into the lead the first moto and just tried to be consistent. It was really tricky because there was a lot of soft spots and hard spots so the bike wanted to get sucked up a lot in the soft areas. And then the second moto, had a good start but then got shuffled in the first turn. Kind of got some back, made some passes and then got up to Barcia and then was able to make the pass and just really tried to push it from there. Opened up a gap and then came in for the win. Overall it was good. I was looking for that 1-1. I had won that first moto but I really wanted the 1-1 just because I hadn't done that all year and I really felt like it was time to get that done as well. Not greedily or anything like that, but that was my goal today regardless of being at the hometown race.

Talk about the downhills. It really looked like you were picking up a ton of time there. What were you doing different or special?

I guess the credit I got to give to the team. We did some testing this week and found some new things. With the new bike that we started with this year, it was new coming into outdoors so it's taken us some time but I really feel like we're adapting with the times and the tracks and gaining really good progress. They're minor changes these days but I really felt like a couple adjustments we were able to make during the week and then a couple clickers this week, I just felt comfortable. I felt like my bike allowed me to do that. It felt plush and comfort. There's a point where the bumps got pretty steep towards the end of the moto. So you were getting kicked more but in the beginning that's where I was able to make up a lot of ground I think in both motos, just coming down the hill and getting down into the corner quicker. I knew that if there was going to be a pass made that's where I needed to do it, so that's what we were able to do.

Considering the outcome at Red Bud, how much concern did you have with Barcia in that second moto when you were chasing him and then also once he got by you?

Barcia's going good. The last three races he's coming-off some confidence. He's got some confidence from winning the races and then obviously beating me straight-up at Red Bud. There were some things at Red Bud we needed to fine tune and that's what we were able to do this week. Like I said, we did an awesome job. But I knew that both motos he's going to come out... the starts are good. It seems like he always gets good starts and he opens-up good. He's got that intensity so therefore I'm going



to have to match that and then some. Then the second moto I was about 5th. I got shuffled back and then I made the passes happen. Found myself on Barcia and it took about four or five laps I believe to get around him but once I was able to get around him then I know I can't stop.

Then I know I need to just keep on that pace and even try to pick it up because when you're behind somebody it's tougher because you're getting roasted. But when you're in front, now I'm able to ride my lines. So I was able to kind of raise that intensity even more. And yeah, it's uncomfortable physically but that's what it's going to take to get away from him and open up that gap and win. So knowing that and then the last couple laps I was able to kind of chill out a little bit and run it in for the win.

Did you pick up anything watching his lines when you were behind him or you just stuck to your lines?

No, I stuck to my lines. I searched around the first moto a lot. I knew what I should and shouldn't do by the second moto. I feel like some insides really opened up nice. Like I said, the track was unbelievably good. I knew by the second moto that traction was fine. The bumps were a lot of fun to time and everything. And then the sand rollers in the back got really good. So the track really set-in and I was able to kind of take the lines I wanted to in the first moto, but the first moto wouldn't allow me because it was just so deep.

What about in the first moto when you tried to do the triple up the hill? You thought you had the drive, right?

I knew we were going to be doing it either way but I heard Martin went for it and came

up a little short. So I kind of tested it out on the parade lap, kind of let's see here. But it took a little bit more gas than I anticipated and I didn't give it all the gas I should have. It's funny because you'd think it would just carry you up over the hill, over the triple, and it didn't do that. It more shot me up. I'm like, oh, man. And it's sticky and it just sucked up everything. I almost got passed back by (Phil) Nicoletti. I cased it a bunch of times. I couldn't get it timed right the first moto. By the second moto I was like, all right, I'm just going to over-jump it a little bit. And the things were harder and then when I was able to land I was just on the gas driving. You had to do it clean to get the double after it too. And there's time to be made there. There was a lot of time you could gain or lose.

You had won here I think five straight years and then lost the last two. How important was it to come back here and win on your home track?

Important. I felt like it's a track that if we're going to win this is one... I like the dirt. I like everything about it so there's a good comfort here. But to not win was a little bit upsetting. The first year, '13, I'm not sure what happened. My chain derailed and I had to put the chain back on. So I was fortunate to even get a podium that year. And then last year I just shuffled around, fell over, this and that. So I was really upset just because I really felt like it should have been a win. So this year things were dialed in more. The bike was better. I felt better. There were just a lot of positives. And we're at that point in the season that everybody's kind of slowly getting separated mentally. I really wanted to be that guy to push through to the end.



NO SHO

—
It's not just what you see the moment you
need to be at your best, it's that you were
passionate enough to spend years of moments
chewing up dirt to get there.



RT CUTS

FEATURE



TURNING UP THE DIAL

ELECTRONICS ARE MORE NOTICEABLE THAN EVER IN MXGP THANKS TO THE HABITS SEEN AT THE LAST FEW GRANDS PRIX ON HARD-PACK TRACKS AND THE PRESENCE OF CABLES AND LAPTOPS THE MOMENT A BIKE ENTERS A TEAM AWNING. WE SPOKE TO THE FIM AND A FEW OF THE TECHNICIANS IN THE PADDOCK RESPONSIBLE TO SEE WHERE THE TECHNOLOGY IS HEADING AND HOW IT IS GOING TO AFFECT THE RACING...

By Adam Wheeler
Photos by Ray Archer

Sitting in the departures lounge in Gothenburg airport after the Grand Prix of Sweden I was listening with interest as a factory-backed rider told me about the race in Germany two weeks before. This MXGP athlete had been lapping with HRC's Evgeny Bobryshev on the slick Teutschenthal hard-pack and described how he was having to feed on the power gently while the Russian was able to come alongside, whack open the throttle, find traction and take off. It is common knowledge that Honda has some of the best and most advanced resources for development and racing in the paddock. The team are friendly and welcoming but the staff understandably button-up when it comes to the technical nature of their work, and the presence of almost half a dozen Japanese who have flown from the other side of the world to lend their expertise to the CR-F450RW indicates there is some valuable R&D going on. We won't really know if the '21' and '777' bikes are the most advanced in the MXGP field but it would be a fair guess to say there is a lot going on internally when those motorcycles are kickstarted (electric started in 2016 apparently).

Since the 450s embraced fuel injection midway through the last decade data recording and analysis have been used to monitor various performance related issues with the motor and power character set-up personalised to the rider. These boundaries at 'the sharp end' have expanded to encompass general aspects of the motorcycle's behaviour and the progress of systems like GET's 'Power Assistance'; a loose form of traction control. The FIM blocked the use of live transmission of data and even measurement of reading telemetry outside of awnings in Grand Prix (teams used to be able to 'plug in' while in the pitlane) to try and slow the march of software/hardware evolution - and therefore costs - but it is now having an unquestionable influence on the state of GP bikes in both MXGP and MX2.

To try and get a handle on what is happening and why and how it can shift in the future we cornered FIM CMS President **Tony Skillington**, Monster Energy DRT Kawasaki's **Josh Pitts** (the engineer behind Max Anstie's Latvian GP-winning KX250F and collaboration with auto racing behemoth Cosworth), Yamaha Factory Racing Yamalube's **Fabio Santoni** (responsible for Romain Febvre's MXGP-leading YZ450F) and Rockstar Energy Suzuki World MXGP's **Roy Matheson** for some more info...





Josh Pitts, Monster Energy DRT Kawasaki:

"I think manufacturers initially fitted injection onto a carburetted motor. Now the motors are much more advanced. If you look at the heads of the 450 and 250 Yamahas for example then those are fuel-injected motors. There is definitely progression and the major OEMs here have a number of people specifically directed to electronics. I would say that it is catching up now with motor racing. With MX2 all the 250s in the paddock are injected and I think the development in engines is not quite at the end of their development cycle but the next step of evolution is through injection."

Fabio Santoni, Yamaha Factory Racing Yamaha:

"Electronics is now almost as important as chassis or suspension set-up. You need electronics for engine set-up. With depression the carburettor was almost 'regulated' but with this if you don't put the correct input then it isn't going to happen. The same with new engine parts: if you change something then it has an effect and needs to be controlled."

Roy Matheson, Rockstar Energy Suzuki World MXGP:

"What we have found in the last few years is that we understand electronics much better for the effect they can have in this sport. We have extended our ECU parameters quite a bit, a lot more options to play with."

Tony Skillington, FIM CMS President: "We haven't been keeping close enough tabs on it, to be frank and honest, and we have let it drift to the point where we are rapidly trying to catch up. We know what is going on and who-has-what but it is about damage limitation in terms of the total inclusion of electronics... which is maybe a year or two away or perhaps less. The technical commission are dealing with it because we want to contain the scene."

Matheson: "There are so many ways to change the ignition, timing and fuel type and everything like that. We keep finding different ways to change it."



Pitts: “I’ve worked with quite a few teams and last year Max’s Yamaha was without a doubt – at the time – the most advanced ‘non-pave-ment’ vehicle I have ever worked on in terms of engine configuration. It was a big learning project for all of us and it was stressful for all us because of how short the actual time frame was. I came into Steve’s team quite late and I learned quite a lot about the difference in European engines, fuels, noise compared to the U.S....it was different and unique.”



Skillington: “Every car, cab and truck on the road these days is virtually fly-by-wire. I would not like to see some missile getting through the airbox, jamming the system and the rider has no chance of shutting off. That is my main concern.”

Santoni: “I think electronics are getting bigger and better every year. There are so many things you can adjust, it is like an open field: many options. You need to check everything, every situation, corner, straight and try to understand what is going on with the bike.”

Pitts: “Part of having the fastest 250 in MX2 is through having the proper electronics!”

Skillington: “As long as you have technicians then you are going to have development and people who are trying to have one system better than the other. That is the nature of motorsport. But at the same time we have to be seen to be keeping a lid on it and cost is one thing but safety is my main consideration. There is a lot of stuff going on in the bikes now – I am not saying that they are running ‘traction control’ but I am saying that they limit the way the power is delivered depending on how hard the throttle is switched on, some people like it softer, some like it harder. Next year production bikes will have launch control, which is another commodity.”

Matheson: “Pretty much every standard bike has some sort of rideability control. It is not really traction control, well, it is, but not in the same sense as tarmac racing.”

Pitts: “How are we using electronics now? There are some areas where you can adjust the engine not necessarily for acceleration where it can be beneficial. Without elaborating too much we have spent a good deal of time - under certain conditions - when the bike is slowing down and it is not so much power-related but chassis-related...and where the electronics create an effect.”

Matheson: “The throttle is always on and off, the rear wheel is always hopping and when it is on the ground then you have wheelspin. We’ve tried to deal with that through reducing engine power – and that’s what everyone thinks it is - but we found the results were questionable.”



Santoni: “The bumps, jumps and the soil all have an effect. Yes, you can see the numbers but you also need to take care of how the track is and to understand that the reading might be affected by one very slippery part.”

Pitts: “The variables are always a problem and the traction varies dramatically as well the loads; Max is an extremely demanding rider both on the bike and off it. Last year there were some things where he came back with a very firm stance. There isn’t so much to worry about with electronics at a test but you look at the data afterwards to see what was tested, the cause-and-effect and what was specifically tried. We confer with the rider to make sure that mentally he is in-line or in-tune with what we are seeing. We make sure that the rider is presented with all the information and if he is narrow-minded then you just need to take that into consideration. A rider is a data recorder as well. The feeling is in his brain.”

Santoni: “OK, there is some assistance but not a huge amount at the moment. It is not as extreme like [Dani] Pedrosa crashing because his sensor was broken. It is more about providing an easier ride.”

Skillington: “I would like to see a situation whereby we have the information from the manufacturers and we decide: ‘this is good, this is simple, this works’. We need skilled enough people to be able to plug into the ECU and see what is going on. That’s how I see the future – it won’t be just a simple noise test. We need to be able to get in and find out what is happening. We don’t want to step on toes and we also don’t need every detail up on the table but we do need to understand what is going on and what each motorcycle is capable of. Whether that’s a steering angle sensor, wheel speed sensors...all of that kind of stuff feeds into the ECU and in turn gives a level of control and allows technicians to see where they can make it better...and faster of course.”



FEATURE



Matheson: “Electronics is all down to rideability. Making the bike easier to ride fast. You can go as far as you want but the more parameters and the more options means more possibility for riders to get lost or make the wrong changes.”

Pitts: “The disadvantage is that electronics can unfortunately drive costs up and it can get out of control but if you are creative you can do quite a bit.”

Skillington: “I went and had a look at what KTM use in the U.S. where they mount a system at the top of the stadium and they could monitor their riders’ performance and even against those of others. They can even see g-forces, which I thought was pretty cool, and analyse heart-rate, blood pressure and all that other data. I find the sport of Rugby very interesting and every Pro player these days has a mini transponder stuck between his shoulder blades which is monitoring all sorts of medical information in relation to what is going on in his body. They can monitor all the stresses

on joints, impacts and other information. Motocross of the 1970s is long gone. There is a certain amount of this stuff that we have to recognise. If it is there and can be used and it is safe then it is interesting and it is not creating the ‘million dollar motorbike’. That is where the journey is taking us at the moment and lets see where it goes.”

Santoni: “I think Honda have a lot of sensors on the bike and a lot of information. I think it could go in this direction. Perhaps it will not be solely about the rider judging how much throttle he has to give and it seems like it is heading in this way...but then motocross has those factors that make electronics a little harder to judge.”

Pitts: “I would say the sensors have not changed much but people are trying to exploit those sensors for as much information as we can to understand what is going on. You can reference a lot of parameters back and forth and there are other forms of data. You can monitor through other sensors additionally



what the rider is doing and what he is asking of the bike and the inputs he is making in terms of the position of the chassis and how he enters and exits a corner.”

Skillington: “We are now in a position where we can hopefully get a meeting with the promoter of Supercross in the United States – we have spoken about it – the Coombs and the Outdoors, obviously Giuseppe and Youthstream so that we can sit collectively and talk about the future of the sport, the development of the bikes and what they are going to look like in four or five years time. We are not pushing anybody at this stage for a date and time but we need to start the discussion and there is no point in waiting any longer. I want to get as much information and give people enough time as possible to consider and at an agreed date and time to do it.”

Matheson: “Electronics is never going to have an effect where the rider can just whack open the throttle. I will still be about line choice and the right amount of throttle at the right time.”

Pitts: “I don’t think electronics will stop and the rules are fine but it does create a ‘David and Goliath’ situation, the ‘have and have nots’. If you put restrictions then it just restricts the lower end programmes. The beauty about electronics is that it is not a physical item – you have some physical side to it – and the limit becomes about the creativity or how quickly you can process information. We can sample at an extremely high rate but the problem we have now is that we cannot physically analyse it and come back with a workable solution in time. The four-strokes have become more expensive and that is just evolution...and there is a lot more advancement to come in injection.”





TONY CAIROLI

By Adam Wheeler
Photos by Ray Archer

THE TIPPING POINT?

IS TIME RUNNING OUT FOR TONY CAIROLI TO
STRETCH HIS TITLE-WINNING PARTY STREAK
TO SEVEN YEARS? WE ASKED THE MXGP
STAR TO GAUGE HIS CHANCES AND ALSO
GIVE SOME OPINIONS ON OTHER MATTERS
FLOATING AROUND GRAND PRIX...

Tony Cairoli has enjoyed a championship winning party in MXGP every year since 2009 but as the races click down in the 2015 campaign the Sicilian is running out of time. A fractured left arm means the 29 year old needs an injection every time he has to buckle a helmet. The qualification heat crash that caused the injury in mid-June at his home Grand Prix meant that the champion joined the swelling ranks of Nagl, Desalle, Villopoto as part of the MXGP injury collective and has had to watch Romain Febvre visibly grow in confidence, speed and championship-winning mettle.

2015 has been out of the norm for Cairoli. At first there was the hyped Villopoto duel (which – sadly – never came to fruition on the track or in the points), then the switch from the 350SX-F which he had won since 2009 to the 450SX-F for round six where he took an overdue first victory. That success in Spain seemed to be the start of Cairoli's push and was followed by more triumph at the British Grand Prix for round seven. Before the Red Bull KTM star could begin to impose his speed and consistency on the class – as we have seen so often in the past – a mistake at Maggiora threw all his plans to the reeds.

As the FIM World Championship travels to the Czech Republic and Loket his weekend and a circuit at where Cairoli has voiced his distaste of the slippery hard-pack '222' is looking at a 41 point deficit to Febvre and, perhaps symbolically, not held the red plate as series leader once this season. To help his plight it looks as though Nagl and Desalle will be back in play and both have a fondness for Loket so Febvre will have more of a challenge. Then MXGP heads into the sand for rounds fourteen, fifteen, sixteen which will be Cairoli's 'Alamo' to keep the gold background to that 222 plate. But will he be fit in time to take advantage of his favoured terrain?

We spoke to the champ in Latvia, over a coffee and where he wore the expression of a man hanging onto a prize with just one hand. There is a rigid determination, professionalism, and deep experience about Cairoli as well as a balls-out steadfastness in the way he has stayed on the track with injury that only provokes admiration. He has no more to prove in many people's eyes but there is something in his character that will not let 2015 slip away. He provides a stark contrast to departed peer Ryan Villopoto and there is the feeling that if he does emerge with a ninth crown come September and with the close of play in California then it will be a campaign to savour...

Where is the injury bothering you most at the moment?

Not so much in the wrist but near the elbow because I cannot straighten my arm and I cannot stand up. I have a lot of pain when I do that so I am sitting down a lot.

What did the doctor say about the recovery period? Would it be two weeks or two months?

Normally – so, no riding – in four weeks it would be fixed but after Maggiora we had the German GP the following week and I had a small crash there. We discovered that the fracture had moved since we last had an x-ray and on one side has gone sideways. The doctors were not too happy...but the positive news was that it was starting to heal, so if there are no other crashes or big impacts it will be OK in five-six weeks.

Do you need to ride with painkillers?

Always. An injection.

It must be very difficult to race at maybe 60% of what you can do...

In the first two rounds since it happened, so Maggiora and Teutschenthal, I was riding mostly with one hand! When I hit a big bump I had to loosen my grip. I wanted to let go of the bar but if the handlebar twists then I know I

TONY CAIROLI



am going down. In Sweden and after one and a half weeks it was a little bit better because the swelling and haematoma had gone. I could hold on a bit better in some places. It was still not so good and I was riding scared of the bumps and I could not do what I wanted on the bike. The left corners are especially difficult because I cannot put the bike down. I am just trying to survive at the moment.

So that third place in Sweden was the best news since Maggiora...

Yes, it was good news...but for the championship it was not enough. I also crashed in the first moto and lost a lot of points there. It is a difficult moment but I am trying to stay as close as I can to the lead and hopefully when I feel better I can win again.

The Grand Prix of Czech Republic is coming up at a track I know you hate but there are three sandy Grands Prix in August. So the question is: will you be fit to really try and take maximum points there and get the championship back on track?

I hope so! Anyway my riding on hard-pack this year has not been so bad and I was second at Arco [round two, GP of Trentino]. If I already feel stronger in Loket then I will push to win. Right now there are not so many riders at the front and it feels like Romain is always in the top three and it is very difficult to get points back on him.

When you think back to that crash in Qualification for Maggiora...was that your mistake or just bad luck?

It was my mistake. I went a little bit too wide in the corner before the uphill, went on the bank and some small stones that caused me to lose traction and kicked me off. I had been doing that line in pre-qualification and it was OK and I was winning some time in that place. I was not expecting that reaction from the bike.

So what do you say to people who claim you made an error by switching to the 450 this year...

I am sorry I did not take it earlier because I might be in a different position now instead of learning the bike in races, which is different to practice. I really like the bike and I think I have a big gap for improvement with it because I am still riding conservatively. I was learning it and then got injured and now I haven't ridden away from the GPs since Maggiora. I miss time on the bike...but I am excited already for next year because there is a lot to work and some improvement to come.

Did you think about staying away for one race?

A lot. I thought about missing Sweden but because of the injuries generally there are not many contenders and my main rival is always at the front, so there was not much choice. I could not let him get too far away.

There is a feeling again now among the powers of the sport that the 450 is too fast for MXGP. There are many injuries again in the premier class. What's your opinion?

My opinion is that the tracks and the preparation has not been the best. Also the organisers of the events do not have the machines to work on the track. Often the watering system they have is not good enough. Teutschenthal might be an old track that many people like but you cannot have a Grand Prix track now without a watering system. Having a group of firemen standing there with a hose is not something for the world championship. In Sweden you have something that takes twenty minutes for it to start and when they shut it down it still takes fifteen minutes before the water stops! There is mud everywhere. Track preparation is the key [for safety]. It needs to be softer for more lines so watering is not needed and is ruddy so the speed will be lower and it will be more technical.

There is some early talk that in 2018 MXGP could be a class of factory 250s. How do you feel about that?

For me that's fine! I don't weigh much!



TONY CAIROLI

Ryan Villopoto stepped away from the sport before Latvia...that was a shame wasn't it?

Yes...it's a shame he stepped away like this. It was great news when Ryan decided to come and race MXGP and he deserved and totally had my respect for that move. It seemed it was easier for him to come over here and do MXGP but he was not prepared for our tracks. Maybe he underestimated the job and was not as prepared as he thought he was. He believed he would just come here and win – and when you talk with his teammate then this is what he said – but it is a tough championship and I think we have seen that Europe is getting very strong in the last few years. In the future I hope I get the chance to stop in a different way. It was sad that he got injured but I would have come back and raced what I could have in the championship and maybe tried to win in Glen Helen. What he has done for the sport is amazing with all of his titles...but if it was me I would have stopped in a different way.

So you could not retire like that?

No...! Not like that and just disappearing. I would keep racing, try to do the best I can and then stop when the season had finished.

For you the 2016 workload and tests must be on the agenda at some point...

Yes, and I am excited about testing because we have many things to go through. It motivates me a lot with the 450 because we have much to do. For myself also, I know I have some work to do and I can still step things up.

It looks like there might be a Grand Prix in a stadium in Germany in 2016. What's your view?

I think it is the future. OK, we don't want it to be supercross so the track has to be right. But bringing the sport to new people is the future for me and we should find new fans. If we keep going to the same tracks that we had twenty years ago then I don't think we will get new followers. It is nice to have new eyes on the sport.

Finally if you win the championship this year then due to the changes, injuries and people like Nagl and Febvre being strong then I imagine it would be one of your best...

Definitely. People think I am just complaining about my injury but they don't know how much pain I am in and what it is like to almost ride with one hand. I am staying near the top and trying to fight for moto wins so I am happy about my riding and how I have adapted. I cannot wait until I am better. The title would be special and if I can get better then we will try to chase it...I think it would be one of the best.

OPINION: CAN HE DO IT?

I think Romain Febvre's emergence in 2015 has been nothing short of spectacular and if you look at the Frenchman's CV then it is clear that he is a special talent who learned quickly and delivered results every season. This means he is not an athlete that is fazed by pressure or circumstance. It also means that he is arguably Cairoli's toughest competitor for the championship this decade.

I believe a lot will depend on how competitive and fast the Sicilian can be in the sand at Lommel in two weeks and how he comes to handle the rare situation of being the hunter instead of the hunted. By this stage of every term since 2009 Tony has built a gap in the standings and has been able to manage the cushion either through conservative consistency or resolute victory to send a message. He has also seen rivals like Clement Desalle and Gautier Paulin drop away through injury. As Febvre likes to remind the press "anything can happen".

Unlike many I see Romain in control and very in-sync with the Yamaha and he is a tough package. Lommel will be important, at least psychologically. If Febvre takes another victory or beats a struggling Cairoli there then you have to wonder if Tony will have enough time to get fit enough to play a last card in Mexico and the USA.

We have seen Cairoli too strong in the sand and he has tackled too many championship scenarios to be counted out of this just yet... even if Febvre does take another couple of points in Belgium. I cannot help but feel that the same gutsy persistency that has made Cairoli race every week with injury and some willingness of how to get the job done might count for a lot in the six Grands Prix to go.

As much as change in the status quo is never a bad thing (and for sure will motivate Cairoli for 2016) this is why a 2015 championship could easily rank as Cairoli's best. He has had to grind and wince his way to stay in contention and he is grasps that red plate one way or another before Glen Helen – and after – then it will be a fantastic achievement; not least because Febvre has proven to be a solid and relentless opponent.





MX

GRAND PRIX OF LATVIA

KEGUMS · JULY 12th · Rnd 12 of 18

MXGP winner: Glenn Coldenhoff, Suzuki

MX2 winner: Max Anstie, Kawasaki

SAND OR NO SAND GLEN COLDENHOFF'S FIRST MXGP TRIUMPH – THE SECOND GP SUCCESS OF HIS CAREER – WAS A MASTERFUL DISPLAY AND MEANT THE DUTCHMAN WAS THE SIXTH DIFFERENT WINNER IN THE PREMIER CLASS THIS YEAR. MAX ANSTIE TOOK HONOURS IN MX2

NOT SO COLD

By Adam Wheeler
Photos by Ray Archer





PLAY

Thanks to the heavens the problematic subject of watering Grand Prix tracks prevalent in the two previous rounds in Germany and Sweden didn't come to pass at Kegums. Friday's heavy showers and the same brief stormy downpours on Sunday morning meant the fine Latvian soil was going to be wet and rough. As usual the track caused some confusion with riders meddling with suspension settings, sand-scoop tyres and gearing to optimise traction on a surface that looked sandy but was also hard-packed. Kegums frustrated and tested but did not attract the loathing and condemnation from the paddock that had been directed towards Teutschenthal and Uddevalla and which led to the FIM and Youthstream slapping a 'provisional' status on the circuits for 2016 unless they gave guarantees of attention for track preparation.

Pivotal moments at Kegums came from the gate and the 180 degree right-handed first turn. It was on this corner that MXGP series leader Romain Febvre clashed with Tommy Searle in the first moto and suddenly Tony Cairoli's Red Bull KTM crew became excited. Febvre was far behind the pack and started a pursuit that would take him all the way up to eighth place while the still-weak Cairoli was able to register fourth. In the second moto Febvre would steer clear of trouble and have the lead by the second curve. It was then 'goodbye' from the Yamaha man for his seventh moto victory. Febvre not only heads the points table but also the most podiums (seven), GP wins (four), motos and is closing on Max Nagl's 113 total of laps led. The Frenchman would repair the small chip that Cairoli had made to his points margin and in fact extend the gap to 41 but his third place overall was not the headline in Latvia where Rockstar Suzuki's Glenn Coldenhoff supplied the coldest serving of humble pie possible.

The MXGP rookie excelled with his starts and proved that the sandy nature of the course was enough for a specialist to take full advantage. Only hours after he had been told his services

would not be required in yellow for 2016, Coldenhoff found some ideal circumstances to unleash two faultless performances and become the first Dutch winner of a premier class GP since Marc de Reuver in 2008. The 24 year old is a slowburn confidence racer and his mix of top tens and inconsistent moto results have not been inspiring in his first term on the 450 but they hinted at some potential and he cranked that level up to the max in Latvia. He can also be a threat on the RM-Z during August and similar sandy circuits to come. Reserved and modest, Coldenhoff nevertheless said he expected his phone to be ringing in the next few weeks after this 1-2 result and in which he successfully resisted pressure from brand-mate Kevin Strijbos and HRC's Gautier Paulin, who remains in touch for the title hunt.

Monster Energy DRT Kawasaki's Max Anstie seized on the absence of Red Bull KTM's Jeffrey Herlings (surgery to his left little finger meaning a chance of infection rather than complications due to the injury) in MX2 to also show some sand-superiority and claim his second career victory and first on a Kawasaki – the first or the last before a rumoured move to Husqvarna for 2016? The capabilities of the works FC250 were shown in a remarkable first podium finish for Harri Kullas. The Finn had been drafted in by the Wilvo Nestaan Husky crew to replace the injured Alex Tonkov and several years of frustration, injuries and generally feeling the rough end of the sport were partially banished with an effective 5-3 behind local hero Red Bull KTM's Pauls Jonass. "The bike was working good straight away," said Kullas. "Of course there is pressure being 'factory' but I was thinking yesterday 'this is my chance to shine'. I got good starts. The first ten minutes were intense in the second moto and then it was the longest race I ever had. It was a dream come true and I always wanted to make a podium."



Anstie conquers some bizarre terrain in Latvia while Coldenhoff (above left) found the best sandy parts and didn't put a foot wrong all day. Tim Gajser (above) contemplates a foot injury after his first moto crash; the sequence of which can be seen on the next page

There were some concerns for the winner of the three previous MX2 GPs, HRC Gariboldi's Tom Gajser, with the Slovenian leaving the circuit on Sunday evening with a suspected broken foot after his first moto start straight mistake. It remains to be seen what condition the eighteen year old will be in for the Grand Prix of Czech Republic this coming weekend where Red Bull IceOne Husqvarna and Rockstar Energy Suzuki's Clement Desalle are expected to return to boost the MXGP ranks. Round thirteen at Loket will be the last hard-pack event in Europe this year with three sandy fixtures in August and then jaunts to Mexico and the USA in September.





Good style from both Pauls Jonass and Gautier Paulin (below). The Latvian had the crowd animated with his third MX2 podium of the season while Paulin finished second overall and keeps in touching distance of the MXGP championship tussle



Shaun Simpson nudges the gate (but would still make it into eighth place on the first lap with some shrewd moves) while Coldenhoff shows that his recent attention to detail with start practice came in handy







Steven Frossard opened a new Kawasaki chapter where the previous instalment had closed at the 2014 Motocross of Nations. With precious little time on the bike a top six moto finish was a start. Tommy Searle (below left) enters the pits and was later DQ-ed for the route he took. Suzuki's Jeremy Seewer (below right) continues to shine in MX2





Harri Kullas used the power of the FC250 to good effect and a first career GP podium. The Finn bounced back into the reckoning after many had written him off through injury and loss of form





Strijbos powers through the sandy ruts. Kevin adjusted his set-up on Saturday and had no answer to Coldenhoff in the first moto. A bad start in the second meant he just missed his fourth podium finish in a row



CLASSIFICATION & WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

MXGP OVERALL RESULT

Riders

1	Glenn Coldenhoff, NED	Suzuki
2	Gautier Paulin, FRA	Honda
3	Romain Febvre, FRA	Yamaha
4	Kevin Strijbos, BEL	Suzuki
5	Tony Cairoli, ITA	KTM

MX2 OVERALL RESULT

Riders

1	Max Anstie, GBR	Kawasaki
2	Pauls Jonass, LAT	KTM
3	Harri Kullas, FIN	Husqvarna
4	Jeremy Seewer, SUI	Suzuki
5	Tim Gajser, SLO	Honda

MXGP STANDINGS AFTER 12 OF 18 ROUNDS

Riders	Points
1 Romain Febvre	457
2 Tony Cairoli	416
3 Gautier Paulin	391
4 Max Nagl	360
5 Evgeny Bobryshev	345

MX2 STANDINGS AFTER 12 OF 18 ROUNDS

Riders	Points
1 Jeffrey Herlings	423
2 Tim Gajser	377
3 Valentin Guillod	352
4 Pauls Jonass	351
5 Jeremy Seewer	345



Good damage limitation by Febvre. What will he be like in the sand in August? With a 41 point lead in MXGP it is maybe still too early to keep playing percentages

A SHARP CUT...

By Adam Wheeler

Ryan Villopoto's retirement was a strange one. It provoked some comment at the Grand Prix of Latvia but not as much as it should and certainly not as much as an athlete and champion of Villopoto's standing deserved. There were a few dedicatory press releases and that was it. Publicly several Grand Prix riders were respectful and full of admiration for RV and chose to ignore the slow 'fade-out' end to his career. A few others privately voiced their disapproval at the way he chose to drop his commitments and take an easy walk into the sunset.

You have to wonder if top-level racers know something that most of us don't. When I interviewed current World Superbike dominator Jonathan Rea at the team's high-profile launch in Barcelona in February the Irishman – a motocross fanatic by all accounts – was keen to give his opinion on Villopoto's last 'hurrah' in MXGP. "I want him to win and do well but there is a slight doubt," he said. "At the back of my mind I'm wondering 'why come and do it?' Will it be the 'hungry' Ryan from a few years ago? I really hope that he shows up."

Perhaps nobody will really know the depths of Ryan's hunger. Whether MXGP was the only digestible way to fulfil a final year of contract obligations or whether he had genuine designs on making his mark. I saw him bemused by cultural differences such as the attack on the senses that is a walk around the street food market stands in Bangkok or the 'rock star' craze for his time, a look or even his kit while being police-escorted through hundreds of fans baying for him in Argentina. We cannot forget that he became the first American winner of a premier class Grand Prix in Thailand for round two and the manner of his prevailing Qualification Heat victory at Nak-honchaisri even had some journalists in the press

conference fearing that such dominance in the motos themselves would soon have a negative effect on the racing. Where the puzzle seemed to come apart was back in Europe and reports that Ryan was never really settled in his choice of Belgium – where the rest of the international motocross community tend to gather – and was allegedly rooming in a rented chalet of a holiday park rather than an apartment or house where he could make a home.

All 'ifs and buts' of course but you cannot help but ruminate on what would have happened if Villopoto hadn't injured himself at round four. Arco di Trento was a rough introduction to European tracks and he would have been straight into the Valkenswaard sand afterwards but I imagine he would have started to prosper further into MXGP and refinement of his set-up would have made him even more competitive. As he used to say "on some days I will be better...and on others those guys will be faster," and that was a champion's long-term way of looking at the bigger prize. If I had to guess then I would say that Ryan was energised, motivated, frustrated, perturbed, excited and down-hearted through his short time as a Grand Prix rider and because of experiences like the travelling, testing, fans, countries and new tracks. I have no doubt that he is a complex character – and have interviewed him a number of times – and while I believe he had a fire to achieve in MXGP (how could he not respond to all the opinions, commentaries, backslaps and criticisms of his move from the U.S. to Grand Prix?) it was clearly not on the same level as the sheer will that pushed him to such success in the USA.



Casey Stoner seemed to sense it. And when he visited his buddy in Argentina the Australian gave some guarded comments that the working relationship was not yet that smooth between team and rider. Hinting that Ryan was seeing things out rather than aiming to see them through.

I guess Villopoto, in his heart, did the best and most honest thing by deciding 'enough was enough' and that the commitment and push needed to get back to a level of fitness to tackle the Grand Prix guys was not a step he was willing to make again. It seems a clear-cut direction but at one stage he was mired in rumour: Would he contemplate another season in 2016? Is he looking for a ride back at the 2015 AMA Pro Nationals? Is he coming back for the U.S. GP? Will he finish his career at the Nations? By announcing retirement and gaining some distance he ends all and every type of speculation.

There are three tinges of regret for me. Firstly, that we never really saw the Villopoto that decimated the American scene and never enjoyed the sight of that Kawasaki dicing hard for race wins. Secondly, having witnessed the amount of people that passed by the Monster Energy Kawasaki awning at every race just to look at and take a picture of the dormant '2' KX that we didn't enjoy the boost and surge of interest that having Ryan as part of MXGP would have brought to the sport in other corners of the continent. His decision to tackle Grand Prix was a game-changer for motocross and the crowds reacted in the early stages of the season. Attendances are still up for the most part in 2015 but you can only fantasise on the increased 'boom' if a vibrant Villopoto was striving for more GP wins. Thirdly, the way he went back to the U.S., cut himself off from the KRT squad and vanished from the radar was disappointing considering the impact and the poten-

tial he had to grow the sport. Even in a non-active capacity having Ryan committed to the series and the team would have been a huge asset. For a guy who has mostly tended to be a round peg in a square hole when it comes to the rigours and fuss of Pro racing (but what a peg!) he might feel that this was not his role and not his responsibility. I imagine that he felt he'd already given enough time, sweat and blood to MX.

At 26 (27 in a few weeks) Villopoto is tantalisingly young enough to consider a clean break and then re-assess his time in Grand Prix. A vast majority of people, and in particular those that know him well, will say that this is the definitive end for RV. However MXGP still remains a hurdle yet to be cleared if some desire to compete again rears up in his stomach at some point.


I do wonder what the 'Villopoto experience' will have done for other American athletes considering Grand Prix as a career and life switch. Will it have put them off? Or acted as cautionary tale for putting a price on immersion as a form of preparation? In his two brief and unsuccessful wild-card outings Mike Alessi referred to the fact that moving, living and breathing life in Europe was almost essential for having designs on spoils in MXGP. Who will try it next?

The name 'Villopoto' will always attract interest for the frequency in which it pops up in the record books but the allure might have diminished. Casey Stoner went out of MotoGP also young (27) and near his peak but the Australian came back from injury in his final season, won his home Grand Prix and then enjoyed a small farewell party at Valencia before taking third place on Sunday and then packing his fishing rod.



'15 MAXAIR

GLOVE \$29.95
JERSEY \$34.95
PANT \$109.95

A full-page photograph of a motocross rider, Justin Jones, leaning into a turn on a red Honda dirt bike. The rider is wearing a blue and white jersey with red accents, blue pants, and a yellow and black helmet. The bike has a large yellow number '3' on the front fender and various sponsor logos including 'WORCSRACING.COM', 'KTM', 'HONDA', and 'SDS'. The background is a blurred, hazy landscape with some trees.

MAXIMUM AIR
WITHOUT LEAVING
THE GROUND

Justin Jones
2014 ISDE Gold Medalist
2015 San FGelipe 250 Winner





6.5 OF THE BEST

LEATT HAVE NUDGED THE NECK PROTECTION BAR JUST A LITTLE FURTHER WITH THE EXTRA PRACTICAL BENEFITS OF THE NEW 6.5 MODEL. WE SPOKE WITH THREE PROMINENT FIGURES IN GRAND PRIX THAT RUN THE BRACE AND GRABBED THEIR TAKE ON WHY THEY EMBRACE THE PRODUCT AND WHY THEY VALUE THEIR NECKS...

By Adam Wheeler
Photos by Ray Archer

Have we moved on? Are there still questions over neck protection? Leatt – the original pioneers in production of an item that entered the off-road motorcycling mainstream in the middle of the last decade – have since poured money, time and staff into research for other safety products like body armour, knee braces and (boldly) helmets. The South Africans insist they will not entertain a ‘me too’ philosophy and generate equipment solely to be present on dealer shelves with other companies. Their belief has always been about a vision and potential to make something that is better or exploits a weakness of what can be found on the market. Walking around their modest but comprehensive facility outside of Capetown it is easy to see this dedication to advancement.

Leatt are busy, and growing, but they haven’t forgotten their roots and the reason why surgeon Dr Chris Leatt gave up his profession to try and make a difference for motorcyclists when they venture onto the road, track or trail.

The 6.5 is made from carbon fibre and Leatt claim it is their lightest, most ventilated and lowest profile brace yet. We asked Hitachi Construction Machinery Revo KTM’s Shaun Simpson (British Champion and leading MXGP privateer), EMX250 European Championship race winner and title contender Wilvo Forkrent KTM’s Adam Sterry and 2014 MXGP runner-up Yamaha Factory Racing Yamalube’s Jeremy Van Horebeek to talk about some of the other key 6.5 features...



WHY?

Sterry: “I’ve always worn a neck brace and I know there are people that don’t but I have always seen it like my knee braces. I feel it is important. People talk about collarbones but I know I’ve had a few crashes where I have landed heavily on my neck and I feel the brace has had an effect. I’ve then had some aches around my shoulders...but I’d rather have that than a broken neck. I used Atlas last year and liked it but took a Leatt this year. I liked the weight and because I use the Leatt body armour as well I can get the straps nicely in place. I don’t really notice I have it on.”

Van Horebeek: “I’ve been with Leatt for a long time. When I was a kid, fourteen years old I think, I started wearing the foam collars and moved straight onto Leatt; it must be nearly ten years now. I actually saw some guys in karting using the foam collar and made a decision about my safety quite early. I didn’t need any persuasion and took the decision myself. I feel good with it. This year it came off in Argentina in the first moto and for the rest of the race it felt like something was missing.”

Sterry: “People have their own opinions on whether it works and the side effects but they have been tested and some of the best riders in the world use them.”

LEATT 6.5



FEATURE



PRACTICALITY – LEATT CLAIM: NEW ON-BOARD SIZE ADJUSTING. NO PARTS NEEDED. NEW ON BOARD 4-ANGLE REAR THORACIC ADJUSTMENT: 0, 5 AND 10°.

Simpson: “What I liked about the older brace was the greater possibility for customisation but the new one you can set up and personalise it to your body shape far easier. You just move the back strut and then the chest piece and you are ready to go. The shape is completely different, there are less components – so less things to go wrong or to wear-and-tear – and it is easier to wash.”

Van Horebeek: “I had the 6.5 before the Nations and before it was released. It felt good and much lighter. I think they have enough experience to know how much of a better job it is doing. I like that you can fold it up and put it easily in the kit bag. You can also fit it to your body much simpler – without any screws or components – compared to the older version that needed you to add some pieces.”

Simpson: “Another good part is that the back support folds away. With the old version you could break it down but the strut was still there and it was awkward to stick it in your bag. The new one has a hinge and you can throw it just on top of your jeans or as the last thing in your kit bag. There is no chance of anything getting broken, damaged, twisted or bent: so much more practical. I’m lucky being sponsored by Ogio that I can carry it in my helmet case when I’m going practicing. For some people maybe it is a ball-ache to start using any kind of brace because they are not used to it or carrying it about but, like I said, it is an invaluable part of my protection.”

COMPATIBILITY AND WEIGHT – LEATT CLAIM: LIGHTWEIGHT 600G STILL VERY RIGID WITHOUT FLEX. NEW HELMET RIM STRIKING PLATFORM PROFILE. NEW IMPROVED HELMET SIDE CLEARANCE.

Sterry: “I used to wear a padded body vest. I’ve always been a fan of wearing the least amount possible but I took the Leatt body armour and there have been some crashes this year where afterwards I’ve thought ‘I’m so glad I had that armour’. At first it felt a bit bulky but after two or three times riding it was fine.”

Simpson: “The older brace had a tendency to feel a bit loose over time but this one holds its shape much better and seems to be more resistant. It looks good as well! I also use the Leatt chest protector and it fits well with it.”

Sterry: “There is a range of sizes for the brace and then five or six different settings to each one. You can fit it exactly how you want it.”

Simpson: “I know people who wear bigger helmets and my Shoei has quite a big back lip and I don’t think there are any issues there are all.”

Sterry: “I first tested the plastic version, which was good but slightly on the heavy side, at Valkenswaard I got the new 6.5 in carbon and it was straight away much lighter. I honestly did not know it was there and I’m not sure if they can get it any lighter.”

Simpson: “It is like a blend of carbon and plastic. The main body is carbon but the top bits and the chest mounts - that provide a bit more cushioning - is more of a foamy material. It feels solid.”

Van Horebeek: “It has become a lot lighter compared to the beginning. Everything is in carbon-fibre and I guess it is stronger. I’ve had a few crashes where the back strut has broken so I know it has played a role. I cannot say “this will save my life” but I feel it will do something.”

CUSTOMISATION

Sterry: “When I got the new carbon one I thought ‘that is much cooler’.”

Van Horebeek: “I have one colour and just keep it all year. It is quite natural – yellow and white. It is more about safety than style.”

Simpson: “There is always potential for customisation. I think we have ten templates for stickers that Leatt have made themselves: you have full, half or a design that leaves the carbon showing. I don’t think that you need much space on a Leatt brace to pimp it out. It definitely looks better with stickers on it. If it was just black or grey then it would stick out like a sore thumb but if you have a design that fits with your helmet or kit then it adds to the style. It is weird seeing people who have ridden with one for so long suddenly not use one, like Jeffrey [Herlings] in Sweden. He looked a bit ‘naked’ and like his neck was twice as long. It is kinda how I feel. It is part of my protection and ‘me’ and that’s how it is going to be.”

THE FUTURE

Van Horebeek: “It is tough to talk about crashes. I’ve had some big ones where the brace has been intact and then some other ones where the strut has snapped free and it does make you think about what my head was doing while I was falling and what kind of flexion was there. I think there is a part of neck protection that will always be a bit of a mystery but I know I feel better wearing it.”

Sterry: “More protection? People don’t wear elbow pads anymore because they slip down or you had to have them too tight and it gives you arm pump. I don’t think there is much more you can really consider.”

Simpson: “On the whole I think Leatt are heading in the right direction but perhaps they could still trim the brace down a bit more or perhaps make it a bit sleeker. As a brace that comes off the shelf and you just chuck it on and go riding then that is what they have aimed for and with the 6.5 they’ve hit their goal.”



LEATT 6.5





MOTOGP

WELCOME BACK

Photo by Repsol Honda



PLAY

FROM LAP FIVE OF THIRTY IN GERMANY MARC MARQUEZ FINALLY TOOK (JUST) HIS SECOND WIN THIS YEAR AND STRETCHED A STREAK OF SUCCESS TO SIX AT THE SACHSENRING. THE VICTORY CAME JUST PRIOR TO THE SHORT SUMMER BREAK AND SOME IMPORTANT CHASSIS TESTS AT MISANO. WILL THE CHAMPION BE A RENEWED FORCE COME THE SECOND PHASE OF MOTOGP THIS TERM?



MID-TERMER...

By David Emmett www.motomatters.com

Halfway there. After nine races, the contours of the 2015 MotoGP championship are starting to appear through the fog of war. So what have we learned so far, and what can we expect in the second half? A few matters to ponder.

1. The 2015 champion will come from the Movistar Yamaha garage...

Yamaha have been on an upward trajectory for the last couple of years and now have the best bike on the grid. The changes made to the YZR-M1 over the winter removed the bike's last weaknesses, closing the gap to the Honda where the M1 was struggling without sacrificing any of its strengths. Changes to the chassis and the upgrade to a fully seamless gearbox mean that the Yamaha can now just about match the Honda and Ducati on the brakes. The M1 has better corner speed and better mechanical grip on exit, meaning it is the fastest bike out of the turns. It lacks top speed, but that is not an issue, given the very brief periods the bikes spend flat out. Before being able to pass the Yamaha, first you have to catch it, and with the M1 grabbing five to ten meters out of every curve, it needs a long straight to get close.

Aboard the best bikes set two of the four best riders in the world are both rejuvenated after difficult periods. Valentino Rossi's return to form has been stupendous and a sign of just how fiercely the ambition still burns within him. Having seen how Marc Márquez has moved the game on in terms of riding style, Rossi has worked over the winter on his own style and body position. He is now a thoroughly modern rider. His team, too, have done well, giving him a competitive bike every single weekend. He is a paragon of consistency, having been on the podium every race this year. Above all, he has been able to use his experience, winning when he can – outfoxing Márquez

at the chicane at Assen, for example – and ensuring he takes a podium when he can't. It's hard to call the championship this early but the stars appear to be aligning in The Doctor's favour.

Jorge Lorenzo had less far to come back. Careful monitoring of his fitness over the winter meant he was in the best shape of his career at the Sepang tests, and he has only got better since then. He has proven that he can beat Valentino Rossi in a straight contest, but only if the conditions are right. Winning four in a row brought him back into the title chase, and with some of his favourite tracks coming up – Brno, Silverstone, Aragon – Rossi will have his work cut out. Luck and tyres have worked against him so far this year. The season started on a tough note, a loose piece of helmet lining limiting his vision at Qatar, and then suffering a bout of bronchitis at Austin. Lorenzo is still reliant on edge grip, though, and when tyres and conditions do not allow him to exploit that, he struggles. Expect this one to go down to the wire.

Is it impossible for Marc Márquez to spoil the Yamaha party? Deficits of 65 points to Rossi and 52 points to Lorenzo look just about insurmountable. The reigning champion needs to win the remaining nine races, and even then he needs both Rossi and Lorenzo to finish worse than second multiple times. Neither of those eventualities appear very likely just now.

2. Honda love horsepower just a little too much

"We must make our bike easier to ride!" That was what HRC boss Shuhei Nakamoto told us at Valencia last year. HRC's engineers did not appear to share that sentiment, as they have made the bike even harder to ride. They have been seduced by the siren call of horsepower, and the fear of being outclassed along the straight by the Ducati.



They built an engine that is ferocious, but with just 20 litres of fuel to use, it is incredibly hard to manage. Worse still, with engine development frozen until the end of the year, they are stuck with it.

Honda's horsepower addiction has almost certainly cost Marc Márquez his title. Since the start of the season, Márquez has struggled with the bike, on both corner entry and corner exit. The issue on corner entry has left Márquez toothless and deprived him of his main weapon, incredible strength in braking and the ability to turn into a corner later than any other mortal. A partial fix came after Barcelona, when Márquez switched back to using the frame he had in 2014. That made him competitive at Assen, and brought him victory at the Sachsenring, but those were slightly unusual tracks. The braking problem – the rear sliding uncontrollably under hard braking for fast corners – is still there, but there were only a couple of corners in Germany where that was an issue. At other tracks – Indianapolis, Silverstone, Aragon, Sepang – Márquez will have it a lot tougher.

3. Can Suzuki keep surprising us?

The best-handling bike on the grid? The Suzuki GSX-RR, by a very long margin. Bradley Smith complained of having Suzukis slip up the inside and dive round the outside of him in corners, with nothing he could do about them. Suzuki's engineers have done an astonishing job at building a competitive bike, as one pole and four front-row starts this year clearly demonstrate. All Suzuki need is a seamless gearbox and a few more horsepower, and they should be right in the mix at the front.

Can they deliver, though? Both Aleix Espargaro and Maverick Viñales are starting to show signs of impatience after their initial strong results. Devel-

opment of the bike has not kept pace with their expectations, the seamless gearbox experiencing delays, and no sign of still more power. In the past, Suzuki has had a reputation for not quite committing sufficient resources to be consistently competitive. Their two riders have proved they are worthy of such commitment, and the staff on the team are equally exceptional. Everyone involved deserves success, it is up to the engineers in Hamamatsu to play their part.

4. The Ducati GP15 is not quite as good as we thought it was...

For the Ducati Desmosedici GP15 to get a pole and a double podium in its very first race was a remarkable achievement. After years of misery, the Bologna factory was finally back where many felt it belonged: at the front. That early success has faded, the Ducati clearly showing signs of teething troubles. The GP15 really is a great bike, but it is just six months old. "It is just a baby," said Ducati team boss Davide Tardozzi. "The trouble is our baby was too fast too early."

What Ducati are really lacking is data. You only get data from doing lap after lap at every circuit you go to. Ducati started the season with only a vague inkling of what their base set up might be, and have spent the first part of the year trying to figure it out. As the others have got faster, Andrea Dovizioso and Andrea Iannone have fallen behind. They have had their fair share of bad luck too, making the task seem even tougher. The summer break will give Ducati Corse a chance to work through the data and try to figure out the basics of the bike. That should provide a good starting point for the rest of the year. Their aim was to win a race this year. That may prove to be a little too much to ask, especially given the competition. Next year, though, all bets are off.



TEST

NO STOPPING THE GROWLERS

By Roland Brown, Photos by Milagro

MORE ITALIAN FANCY WITH THE LATEST V4 OFFERINGS FROM APRILIA AND A CONTINUANCE OF THEIR 'NO COMPROMISE' TO SPORT-EDGED PERFORMANCE. ROLAND GOES FOR A RIDE ON THE APRILIA RSV4 RF & TUONO V4 1100 R AND GIVES HIS VERDICT AGAINST THE COMPETITION



APRILIA RSV4 RF & TUONO V4 1100 R



TEST

Aprilia has always been a seriously sporty bike firm, dating back to the Nineties when a couple of young Italians named Rossi and Biaggi won grand prix world titles on two-strokes. These days the firm's superbikes are based on a compact V4 powerplant, and live up to that hardcore reputation. The latest super-sports RSV4 RF and super-naked Tuono 1100 V4 are arguably the fastest, raciest and most uncompromising machines in their respective classes.

That's true of the RSV4 RF despite the ferocious level of competition in this year's super-sports segment. The RSV4 has been a track-focused weapon ever since the original model arrived in 2009, and that attitude remains. The RF – the F standing for Factory, Aprilia's traditional designation for its highest spec models – adds Öhlins suspension and forged wheels to the format, but there's no sign of the heated grips and cruise control that are options on its BMW S1000RR rival.



What the RSV4 does get is more power. The 65-degree V4 unit keeps its 999cc capacity but is extensively modified, and joins the 200bhp club with a claimed maximum output of 201bhp at 13,000rpm, 16bhp up on the previous model. Much of its technology comes from the track, including its bigger inlet valves, lighter camshafts and conrods, CNC-machined combustion chambers and redesigned exhaust.





Chassis changes are less extensive and include slightly reduced weight, racier steering geometry and a longer swing-arm for enhanced stability. Upgraded electronics include Bosch's latest lean-angle sensor, which allows a revamped traction control and anti-wheelie control. The new GPS-enabled telemetry system connects the bike to a smartphone. This allows downloading of data after riding, plus tuning of traction control and anti-wheelie for individual racetrack corners – technology that even MotoGP bikes haven't had for long.

The RF is breathtakingly fast, its performance not far off that of the factory RSV4 on which Sylvain Guintoli won last year's World Superbike title. On the launch at Misano it charged down the kinked back straight with a glorious V4 bark. Revs built with thrilling speed as I flicked through the box with the quick-shifter, which loses a point by not working on down-shifts, like those of the S1000RR and Ducati's 1299 Panigale.

Handling was as good as it should be from such a light, race-developed bike. The updated Brembo brake system, which now includes Race ABS, worked superbly well too. But even this top-spec RSV4 doesn't match the S1000RR and Panigale with the option of semi-active suspension. As with the lack of cornering ABS, that's because Aprilia haven't yet found the system to benefit lap times.

That uncompromising approach won't suit every rider, partly because many bikes will spend most if not all of their time on public roads. But you have to admire Aprilia's attitude, which dates all the way back to those grand prix two-strokes of the Nineties. The result is a stunningly fast and track-focused machine that takes the RSV4 to a new level.

The Tuono V4 1100 doesn't quite share the RSV4's track bias but even this latest version of Aprilia's naked charger is an ultra-sporty machine that makes most rivals seem flabby. That's despite the fact that it was taken in a slightly more restrained direction than the development team's original plan, which was to fit the Tuono with an unchanged, 180bhp lump from the previous RSV4.

Aprilia did eventually concede that a slightly more rider-friendly update was required. So as well as tweaking the chassis, revising the riding position, updating the electronics and sharpening the styling, they enlarged the 65-degree V4 engine from 999 to 1077cc. The result was a 5bhp power increase that takes the maximum to 175bhp and, more importantly, smoothens low-rev response and boosts midrange output by a useful 20bhp at 8000rpm.

Acceleration is deliciously instant and strong, backed up by an engaging V4 character and a delicious exhaust growl. The chassis is updated with steeper steering geometry plus a longer swing-arm, to boost high-speed stability, and is as light and agile as ever. But despite a more generously padded seat the Aprilia's Sachs suspension can be harsh on rough surfaces, and does little to make the bike suitable for long trips.

Some rivals offer semi-active suspension that could have given a more compliant ride at the press of a button, but the more expensive Factory version of the Tuono is upgraded with conventional Öhlins springs. These days some gearbox quick-shifters work on down-shifts, as well as on up-shifts like the Aprilia's. Nor are features such as heated grips, cruise control and cornering ABS options on the Tuono, though it does have powerful, ABS-equipped Brembo brakes.



Whether that's a drawback depends on what a rider wants from an unfaired superbike. Although this Tuono is a little more rounded than its predecessor, some rivals offer a more versatile yet still thrilling package, in many cases for a lower price. But for those who demand the most exciting, hardcore machine in the class, the answer – as so often – is the Aprilia.



APRILIA RSV4 RF & TUONO V4 1100 R



MotoGP '15

Think you might be able to do a better job of being Marquez than Marquez? Are those Yamaha really that quick? As ever the officially licenced video game allows fans to suspend belief for a moment and engage in a bit of fantasy. With its release two weeks ago 'MotoGP 2015' comes at a reasonably decent stage of the season where the names, colours and teams are valid enough for sufficient game life. We haven't got our hands on a copy but annual instalments of official products (and Milestone are deeply submerged in the sport in terms of their research and software models) usually bring small upgrades and modifications every version and are not merely graphic updates. Selling points of '15' include GP Credits for full customisation, historic two-strokes from MotoGP history, Private Team – where you can work your way through the game from being a wild-card and the PR from Dorna also states: "After the success in 2014, we see the return of the Real Events game mode. This amazing Mode offers the chance to relive more than 50 events selected from the most thrilling and challenging moments in the last season. Take control of the situation and redesign the history to achieve a specific target set by the system." For the graphics engine and handling we can only assume there are some tweaks from the 2014 model but there is little to suggest that MotoGP won't be able to lap up this fresh video game serving.

MotoGP™15 is now available in stores and digital markets. The game is now playable on PlayStation®4, Xbox One, the all-in-one games and entertainment system, Windows PC, Steam, PlayStation®3 and Xbox 360.







BACKPAGE

Monster Energy Girls
By Monster Energy





'On-track Off-road' is a free, bi-weekly publication for the screen focused on bringing the latest perspectives on events, blogs and some of the very finest photography from the three worlds of the FIM Motocross World Championship, the AMA Motocross and Supercross series' and MotoGP. 'On-track Off-road' will be published online at www.ontrackoffroad.com every other Tuesday. To receive an email notification that a new issue available with a brief description of each edition's contents simply enter an address in the box provided on the homepage. All email addresses will be kept strictly confidential and only used for purposes connected with OTOR.

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